

(Washington, DC) Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) made the following statement in response to President Obama's State of the Union address:

“Across the nation, millions of Americans are unemployed and millions more are struggling to make ends meet, including in my own district in South Florida and the Treasure Coast. The American people need more than eloquent words right now, they need real jobs. Congress must take bold action to get Americans back to work. As Co-Chairman of the Democratic Caucus’ Jobs Task Force, I am deeply committed to implementing a comprehensive jobs plan with my colleagues in Congress that will spur job creation and grow our economy.

“The United States spends more on health care than any other country in the world, and yet, the high cost of care has not brought a high standard of health for millions of Americans. This issue hits close to home for Florida. A recent census report listed Florida as the 4th worst in the nation in terms of uninsured individuals. More than 2 million workers in Florida were living without health coverage last year. I am committed to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to ensure that quality and affordable health care is no longer a privilege for some, but a guaranteed right for all.

“Amidst the discussion about Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, airport screening, and prison facilities, there is one essential element not being talked about: our nation’s detainment policy. Simply put: we don’t have one. We have instead a patchwork of haphazard policies which make up a system that endangers our national security, violates the Constitution, and undermines international human rights. The failure to establish a uniform process consistent with the rule of law and America’s values sabotages our counterterrorism efforts and provides al-Qaeda with a prime recruiting tool. In October, after months of consultations with Obama administration officials, key Members of Congress, human rights organizations, and other experts, I introduced H.R. 3728, the Detainment Reform Act, which creates a transparent and accountable system of justice to process detainees under United States control. It is time to move beyond the debate about Guantanamo and create a system that protects our national security, upholds human rights, and improves America’s image around the world.

“I am pleased that President Obama has called for the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. It is important to note that time is of the essence. These brave men and women are linguists, aviators, medics, and highly-trained soldiers who are involved in valuable operations that have nothing to do with their sexual orientation and everything to do with protecting American lives and advancing our national security interests. Each discharge represents millions of dollars

worth of lost talent and funding necessary to retrain new recruits. Our military is already strained, and with another 30,000 more troops being deployed to Afghanistan, we must again ask ourselves, what is the point of Don't Ask, Don't Tell? Let us finally close history's chapter on Don't Ask, Don't Tell and address other issues central to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) equality, such as employment discrimination and repealing the Defense of Marriage Act.

"Our nation faces many significant challenges and the road ahead will not be easy. It is time for Congress and the administration to work together to improve the lives of all Americans," said Hastings.

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings is Vice Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a senior member of the House Rules Committee, and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.

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